

JAPANESE AMBASSADOR HIROSHI SAITO ON THE CONFLICT IN THE FAR EAST

Introduction

In July 1937, Japanese forces, already in possession of Manchuria (which it had renamed Manchukuo), launched a full-scale invasion of the Republic of China (a move that they referred to as “The China Incident”). Chiang Kai-shek’s forces collapsed under the pressure of the Japanese invasion. By December 1937, Japanese forces had already inflicted significant defeats on the hapless Nationalist army.

The task of justifying what, to much of the world, appeared as naked aggression fell to Japanese politicians and diplomats. Hiroshi Saito, Japanese ambassador to the United States, delivered the following explanation, which was reprinted in the journal *World Affairs* in December 1937. Here, he expresses the Japanese government’s point of view.

Document Excerpts with Questions

From *The Search for Modern China: A Documentary Collection*, edited by Pei-kai Cheng and Michael Lestz, with Jonathan D. Spence (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1999), 316-319. [Note: This article originally appeared in *World Affairs*, December 1937, 3-7.]

Japanese Ambassador Hiroshi Saito on the Conflict in the Far East

The conflict in the Far East is by no means as simple in origin as some Europeans and Americans seem to think. The trouble did not begin last July. It is a result of the condition of China, which has caused the invasion of foreign armies for more than a century, and is the reason for the presence there today of British, French, Italian, Dutch, and American troops. If China’s house were in order there would be no need for the presence of these foreign forces of Japan’s present action.

It is difficult for many Japanese people to understand how so many people of the West can fail to see that the trouble is not of foreign but of Chinese making.

The present conflict has been forced upon Japan, and Japan wants it to end as quickly as possible. But she is determined to end it in a way so decisive that a situation like the present can never recur. Our objective, therefore, is a genuine change of heart on the part of those in power at Nanjing. We insist that the organized campaign to stir up hate against Japan be discontinued and that the Central Government renounce the union with Communism [i.e. the “Second United Front” which united the Communist and Nationalist parties in the struggle against Japan] . . .

**Primary Source Document with Questions (DBQs) on
JAPANESE AMBASSADOR HIROSHI SAITO ON THE CONFLICT IN THE FAR EAST**

Prince Konoye, Foreign Minister Hirota and War Minister Sugiyama have all stated that Japan is not bent on conquest and has no desire to detach or annex any part of China. What our government and people want is peace and security in the Far East.

Questions:

1. How does the Japanese ambassador specifically appeal to what he, in 1937, knows to be the prejudices and the weak points of Europeans and Americans with regard to the situation in China?
2. It has been said that all good propaganda is based on a core kernel of truth. What is true in Ambassador Saito's comments?
3. How might a Chinese person respond to Ambassador Saito's statements?